

St. Mary's Academy Charter School
410 North Tyler Street
Beeville, Texas 78102

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On behalf of St. Mary's Academy Charter School, I would like to thank Senator Judith Zaffirini and Senator Florence Shapiro for the opportunity to speak today in favor of SB4.

St. Mary's Academy was founded in 1896 and has served the Beeville community since then. In 2000, the school was restructured and became a public charter school, operating under the name St. Mary's Academy Charter School, serving approximately **285** students. The student body is approximately **80%** minority, **80%** economically disadvantaged, **50%** at risk, **18%** special education and about **5%** living in foster homes. St. Mary's has been a Recognized district for two of the last three years - in 2004 and 2006.

If there were time, I could tell you about dozens of children who have come to us out of desperation and were able to succeed for the first time in their lives. They graduated from our school with an education, both academically and personally.

Our facilities have been purchased or are rented from the Catholic Church. The oldest buildings are 100 years old. The main school was built in the 1930's when the original school burned. Currently, the school is utilizing every available inch of space for instruction and we are working with an architectural firm on a 3-year master plan for a new facility for Kinder through 3rd grade. The school has purchased some land, and some has been donated. We are also in the process of securing finances.

The provisions in Senate Bill 4 which provide significant facility funding will greatly benefit our school when we qualify. Using an Apples to Apples comparison charter schools in Texas receive about **\$1200 - \$1700 less per student** per year than comparable traditional schools. On behalf of 285 predominately low-income Hispanic students at St. Mary's Academy Charter School in Beeville, I strongly encourage you to enact Senate Bill 4.